

Message Text

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C O N F I D E N T I A L BEIRUT 3525

EXDIS

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PINT, PINS, LE
SUBJ: THE FRANGIEH MASSACRE: VIEWS OF PRESIDENT SARKIS

1. DURING OUR JUNE 24 MEETING, PRESIDENT SARKIS SAID KILL-
ING OF TONY FRANGIEH AND HIS FAMILY WOULD UNDOUBTEDLY LEAD TO
COMPLICATIONS WHICH WERE DIFFICULT TO FORESEE. THERE HAD
BEEN IN THE PAST ONLY TWO FEUDAL LEADERS IN LEBANON WHO WERE
ABLE TO SEND THEIR FOLLOWERS FFBVWJSYRAVNCWJ, JUNBLATT AND
SULEIMAN FRANGIEH. GEMAYELS NOW HAD THAT POWER, BUT IT WAS
A RECENT ACQUISITION. WARLIKE TRADITIONS OF EHDEN-ZGHORTA
MADE IT INCUMBENT ON FRANGIEH TO TAKE REVENGE. THE NATURE
OF THE BLOW DEALT HIM--IT HAD BEEN STRUCK ON HIS HOME TERRI-
TORY AGAINST HIS OWN FAMILY--MADE IT NECESSARY FOR HIM TO
DELIVER A SIMILAR BLOW TO THE GEMAYELS. HE WOULD NOT BE SATIS-
FIED WITH REPRISALS AGAINST THEIR RETAINERS IN BATROUN OR
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SHEKKA OR SOME OTHER PLACE. HE MUST STRIKE AT PIERRE, BACHIR
OR AMIN IN BIKFAYA ITSELF. WHETHER HE HAD THE POWER TO DO SO
WAS QUESTIONABLE. IT MIGHT DEPEND ON WHETHER SOMEONE ELSE
HELPED HIM.

2. I ASKED IF HE THOUGHT THE SYRIANS WOULD PROVIDE THAT HELP.
SARKIS SAID HE DID NOT KNOW. TO DATE, THE SYRIANS HAD BEHAVED

VERY PRUDENTLY. INDEED, THEY HAD BEHAVED PRUDENTLY THROUGHOUT THE PAST 18 MONTHS, IN SPITE OF NUMEROUS PROVOCATIONS.

3. I ASKED IF HE THOUGHT PIERRE GEMAYEL OR BACHIR HAD ACTUALLY ORDERED THE MURDER OF TONY AND HIS FAMILY. HE SAID HE FOUND IT VERY DIFFICULT TO BELIEVE PIERRE, OR EVEN BACHIR, HAD ORDERED OR INTENDED TONY'S DEATH. RATHER, HE SUSPECTED PIERRE HAD BEEN TOLD THAT THE PEOPLE WHO HAD MURDERED JUD AL-BAYIH AT BATROUN WERE BEING SHELTERED AT THE FRANGIEH HOUSE AND THAT AN OPERATION WOULD BE MOUNTED AGAINST THEM, TO WHICH HE HAD AGREED. TONY AND HIS FAMILY AHD DIED IN THE FIRING WHICH RESULTED.

4. HE SAID PROCURER GENERAL HAD SKETCHED FOR HIM OUTLINE OF WHAT THEIR INVESTIGATION HAD REVEALED. PHALANGE HAD SUR-ROUNDED FRANGIEH HOUSE AND HAD LAUNCHED ATTACK ABOUT 2:00 A.M., HALF HOUR AFTER TONY AND HIS GUESTS HAD GONE TO BED. FRANGIEHS HAD AWAKENED AND RESPONDED IN KIND. FIGHT HAD GONE ON FOR ABOUT HOUR AND HALF, BY WHICH TIME TONY OUT OF AMMUNITION ACCORDING SULEIMAN FRANGIEH. (FROM THIS LATTER FACT IT COULD BE ARGUED THAT TONY MUST HAVE BEEN HUNTED DOWN WITHIN HOUSE AND SHOT IN COLD BLOOD, BUT IT IS HARD TO KNOW WHAT TO BELIEVE THESE DAYS. SULEIMAN FRANGIEH IS ALSO TELLING CALLERS THAT HIS GRANDDAUGHTER'S THROAT WAS CUT, BUT SARKIS SAID HE FOUND IT DIFFICULT TO BELIEVE PHALANGE HAD GONE THAT FAR. I AM INCLINED TO AGREE, ALTHOUGH EVENTS OF 1975-76 SHOWED TO

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WHAT DEGREE CIVILIZED RESTRAINTS HAVE BECOME MEANINGLESS FOR CHRISTIAN AS WELL AS MOSLEM FIGHTERS IN LEBANON.)

5. I ASKED WHETHER PIERRE OR BACHIR HAD GIVEN HIM ANY EXPLANATION OF INCIDENT. HE SAID HE HAD NOT SEEN OR SPOKEN TO EITHER OF THEM SINCE IT OCCURRED. HE UNDERSTOOD AMINE HAD BEEN VERY DISTURBED BY AFFAIR AND HAD JUST SENT A LETTER TO PARTY ASKING THAT THERE BE AN INVESTIGATION INTO INCIDENT AND WHO WAS RESPONSIBLE FOR IT. HE DOUBTED THAT SUCH AN INVESTIGATION, EVEN IF HELD, WOULD LEAD ANYWHERE. NO ONE WOULD BE WILLING TO TESTIFY.

6. COMMENT. IT APPEARS SARKIS HIMSELF IS UNWILLING TO ATTEMPT A FRANGIEH-GEMAYEL RECONCILIATION. PRESS REPORTS THAT ON JUNE 23 HE RECEIVED DEPUTIES OF BECHARRE AND OF MARONITE BLOC, APPARENTLY TO DISCUSS POSSIBILITIES OF LIMITING FALLOUT FROM AFFAIR. CATHOLIC HIERARCHY REPORTEDLY URGING RESTRAINT ON FRANGIEH, BUT IT IS THOUGHT UNLIKELY TO HAVE EFFECT. EVERY KNOWLEDGEABLE LEBANESE TO WHOM I HAVE TALKED EXPECTS FRANGIEH TO WREAK VENGEANCE ON GEMAYEL FAMILY DIRECTLY. QUESTION IS, WHEN? PRIME MINISTER HOSS TOLD ME THIS MORNING GOL DID NOT EXPECT EXPLOSION AT END OF FRANGIEH'S ULTIMATUM JUNE 30.

RATHER, THEY THOUGHT FRANGIEH WOULD TAKE HIM TIME. NEW
SECURITY PLAN BEING PUT INTO EFFECT WILL COORDINATE EFFORTS
AND DISPOSITIONS OF SYRIAN FORCES AND LEBANESE ARMY IN ORDER
PREVENT ANY LARGE SCALE MOVEMENTS OF MEN IN NORTHERN PART OF
COUNTRY. THEY WILL BE UNABLE PREVENT AN ASSASSINATION,
HOWEVER.
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